

Lost: Orange Cat

By JANE BRADLEY

I'm still hoping someone will see my ad at the back of this paper and call to say they've found our amazing orange cat.

But what I'm afraid of is much more likely: a coyote watched him, timed him and snatched him.

We've seen the coyote around in other years, a shrewd and shadowy creature. He's more ethereal than the fox, who floats through our yard and onto the marsh beyond, and, of course, even smarter.

second thoughts

The first time we saw him, he was almost an apparition in the headlights as we pulled into our driveway and he darted into the woods beyond.

"Was that a dog?" I asked my husband. But the way he just vanished, the stone color of him ... we both knew what we'd seen.

In the beginning, he wouldn't get too close, for we have always had big dogs who patrol at night. First, a 190-pound Great Pyrenees, whose ancestral specialty is guarding flocks from predators like coyotes. Now we have a 100-pound German Shepherd, who keeps watch pretty effectively.

Then last summer, the coyote came into the yard and seemed to taunt our dog. He even picked up a hose on the lawn and shook it before he ran off.

But because we live in civilization and not in the wild, our dog wears an electronic collar confining him to our yard and keeping him from wandering into the street or into our neighbors' garbage.

It also kept him from chasing down the intruder last summer. And again, perhaps, last week.

You might not like cats, and so you wouldn't understand how entwined our family life was around this fluffy orange feline, who was a gift to my daughter when she was in fourth grade. She is now halfway through college.

Or how he had been on our laps for every daily event, big or small, for more than a decade. How he gave us nothing but boundless affection and amusement in exchange for room and board. How, when any of us was sad or sick, he would appear purring, look straight in our eyes and jump by our side.

Or how stricken we are with grief we cannot fathom.

He, too, was civilized. He had shots and boundaries. He preferred the living room couch to the wild, but each spring, the lure of hunting in the ivy called him out some nights. In the morning, we'd find a tiny mouse or mole on the walk, and he'd expect congratulations.

I wish we had never let him out at night, now that he was getting a little older and slower. I wish we could go back and take the dog's collar off that night he barked and barked at some nocturnal nemesis.

I wish someone would see our ad and call to say our beloved cat is safe and ready to come home.

And I wish you could better protect your own cat — or small dog — from the coyote who preys on our civilized town from a wild perch beyond our reach.

Most of all, I wish I hadn't had to write this.